

Reach Into The Void by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Aged-Up Character(s), Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Canon-Typical Violence, Eleven "died" before she closed the gate, Ensemble Fic, F/M, Jancy, Jopper, Kidnapping, Kind of Canon Compliant, M/M, More subtextual Jancy than anything, Not sure if this counts as graphic depictions of violence, Returning Home, Reunions, Slow Burn, The 90s, The Upside Down Returns, The kids are around 21, The older teens are 25/26, Will Byers Has Powers, byler, i swear there's a plot, so just - warning

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper & Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield & Mike Wheeler, Will Byers & Eleven | Jane Hopper, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

Another supernatural threat arises years later. The kids are now all young adults, with new lives, new problems, and most of them have spread out across the country for school and work. Christmas time brings them back to their hometown and they are reunited once again, with no choice but to join forces to stop the re-emergence of horrors long forgotten.

- All Elements of S2 are included except for the final fight scene and

the snowball. (S3 did not happen in this universe. Although Robin still plays a role. Cause' she's awesome.)

DISCONTINUED: APRIL 2021

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Spotify Playlist:

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/58MwzCvUm2Dyh2efo8Jalz?si=h2IOgitpSZCp37VBkjahBw&utm_source=copy-link

Joyce

"T-Tell him I'm coming for him." Joyce says to Eleven, who's in the freezing cold salt bath. Everyone gathered around the small kiddie pool. Jonathan holds Nancy in his arms as the torrent of her tears stain his shirt. The pink dress Eleven borrowed from Nancy was already dirty with stain marks. She must be cold. Joyce is and she has her sweater on. Her entire body trembled just at the thought of Will being all alone with that monster. In that cold, dark place. She watches as Eleven echoes the words, "Your mom. She's coming for you... soon."

Joyce walks on, yellow rubber boots they gave her crunching on god knows what underneath her feet. Hopper gives her a reassuring glance, holding onto her hand. No sign of Will yet. Positive thoughts. This hellhole has not killed her son.

"Will!" She shouts, taking in his shivering form. A vine stuck into his mouth, going down his throat. Taking away all the remaining air left in his lungs. Hopper grabs onto him, and they place him down on the dark, black ground. He looks so small. So fragile. Joyce can see him hyperventilating, his chest rising and falling with a sudden quickness. He's

fighting for air. He's fighting to stay alive. If there was one thing Joyce knew - and still knows about her younger son, is that he fights to live. No matter what, he's a survivor. "Come on, honey." She pleads, holding his head, the tears falling down her lashes and down the slope of her cheeks. "Stay with us. Please baby. Please-"

In the middle of the night she finally came to know what real madness is. Her long repressed madness wells up and purges itself, and she suffers from - what the doctors would call it - episodes. Every night. Torture in the form of nightmares. Sometimes during the day. Random things can trigger them. A certain song.. a phrase.. or even a thought that pops into her head.

Joyce opens her eyes and for a while she just lays with her head on the pillow looking up at the popcorn white ceiling. Although having been asleep, her eyes did not need to adjust to the dark, but it took her some time to bring the room into focus. She can hear Hopper's steady breathing coming from her left-side. The occasional snore he puts out. But for the most part it's quiet. *Too quiet* . She would never admit it but she misses having to get up in the middle of the night to check on her boys. Just to see them. Safe and all cuddled up in their respective rooms and tons of blankets. She remembers, vividly, when she came into Will's room that morning and he wasn't there. Then the second time. When he ran away.

Joyce was worried sick, Mike had come banging on her door calling out for Will, looking ready to shed tears. He kept on saying how he made a mistake. That he shouldn't have picked a fight in the first place. By the time she checked his room things were missing. And he was gone. She didn't get a call from him until around two months later, saying he was in fact alive and okay. She (*and Hopper*) were relieved to know he wasn't dead in a ditch somewhere.

She clambers out of bed, slipping on her house shoes. Once she makes her way to the kitchen, her throat is dry and sore, every lungful of hot air robs more water from her body. There is a pain at

the back of her head that threatens to grow into a powerful migraine, a sure sign that dehydration isn't far away. As Joyce grabs a cup from the cupboard and fills it up with tap water she remembers what she used to do as a child. Filling up a glass with just ice, no water. The ice against the glass, her fingers sliding on the condensation before they regain their grip on the cup. The chill that ran down her esophagus and how her head made that involuntary shake. The numbness that would creep into her brain. When most of the ice would melt, she would take the remaining small bits between her molars and bite down hard, feeling it melt into cold pools on her palate.

Joyce shivers, closing up her soft black sweater, trying to gain what little warmth she can and heads out the front door. Standing on the old rickety porch. Watching out into the darkness. All she can see is the paved road ahead and the tree outlines. Maybe going outside isn't the best idea considering just how chilly it is, but it does help when her headaches are coming on. It helps clear the racing thoughts. She allows her brain to be empty, in the moment, content to exist and be. The morning would bring the beauty of the ice for sure, that crunch under boots and the bold greeting that sharp cold air brings. Yet between now and watching her own breaths rise into white-puffed clouds, it is still the dead of night.

She would take this opportunity to light a cigarette. Have a smoke. Let the nicotine flush into her body and relax her, but she quit. A while ago actually, around the same time as Hop. It was a pact they made, together. Hop wanted to stop popping pills like they were candy, drinking until he got black out drunk, and smoking like there was no tomorrow. So he stopped. She stopped as well, supporting him - and herself. Joyce couldn't help but wonder if it was something borne of El's unfortunate and untimely death. It was like he wanted to be a better man in the future. Although he was already always caring, generous and kind. His aggressive gruff papa bear act finally was put to rest, only coming out on some days when he gets really agitated.

Things have been quiet for a long time now. Joyce thinks it's too

quiet. She misses the banging of pots made by Jonathan early morning, forcing them all to wake. Will fumbling with the radio by the table until he got on a good song. Jonathan mumbling, at a low tone, the lyrics as he prepares them breakfast. The static filling up the comfortable silence. Waking up to The Clash or Talking Heads or whatever rock band, coming from either boy's bedrooms. Hop being all pissy about it, but eventually giving in to their weird morning ritual formed years ago.

There are days where her burnout and tiredness comes in both forms, physical and mental. Her body needs to rest yet her mind needs it to move, to burn the anxiety right out. Without exercise her mind will keep her up all night long, without rest her body will spiral into exhaustion. Joyce once thought, as a child, her old man weak for falling into a grog, and though she won't go the same way, she understands now. What it's like to feel that way.

She turns her head at the sudden swing of the door behind her. Hop steps out, in a pair of shorts and a quickly thrown on sweater, one that Joyce knows doesn't lock in much heat. He looks extremely drowsy, his eyes adjusting to the strange darkness. When he comes up to her, he wraps his arms around her waist, lovingly. "Can't sleep?"

There was something so warm, something that felt right. She let her body sag, her muscles become loose. He gave her the respect of an equal but cradled her like a cherished child. She felt her worries lose their keen sting and her optimism raised its head from the dirt.

"No." She says, "I'm just worried about the boys."

Another breath rises in a puff, the chilly breeze blew right through Joyce's sweater and she bowed her head to one side, closing her eyes softly. Her brown hair fell loose about her face, tousled, and frizzy from sleeping on it all night. She wraps his arms tighter around herself, and pulls her sweater closed. Hopper tucks his chin

downward into the crook of her neck.

“They’ll be here tomorrow. In one piece... Now lets go inside. I’m freezing.” He takes her hand in his, but before he can lead her inside, she stops him.

“I’ll come back inside in a few minutes. I just wanna stay out a little longer.”

He nods, and returns back inside. She turns her focus back up to the night sky, and the blackness. Some nights even the stars were hidden behind a wall of foreboding clouds. As they move on, across the sky, the winter night drew longer, reluctant to pass. The nights were as ferocious as a dip in a frozen lake would be, taking Joyce's body heat until her lips blued and teeth chattered. No moon in the sky, radiating it's white glow instead the sky is dark and low, the air so chilled it hurt to breathe. Already the ground was laid white with frost and any water that had been liquid would soon become ice.

The house is not much warmer inside than out. Ice creeps across the windows as if spun by wintry spiders. The only warmth to be had is from the heat radiating from Hop's body to her own, as they lay in bed, a big chunky duvet covering the both of them. As the wind rattles against her shaky body, she enters back into the house.

They'll be here tomorrow. In one piece.

2. Eleven

Summary for the Chapter:

She remembers them. Hopper, gruff on the outside but a true softie. He took her in, gave her a home, a place to feel safe. Joyce, caring and gentle yet determined, she treated El like one of her own. Will, so selfless he led the demogorgon away from Nancy so she could escape. He's a unique specimen, like her. Mike, pure hearted and willing to do anything to protect his friends. He helped her when even Dustin and Lucas were skeptical. Lucas, not willing to go down without a fight, he always came through. Dustin, curious and excitable. Max, helping of people she didn't even know. Nancy, quick-witted and diligent. Jonathan, reserved but fiercely protective of the people he loves. He made sure to give her a big hug when she walked through the door, teary-eyed. Steve, an unlikely hero, hilariously and unironically funny.

It's been 2,920 days.

2,920 days Eleven's been trying to get in contact with Will.

2,920 days since she's seen anyone except the rotating line of nurses and guards and the lead person in charge of tormenting her: Brenner.

2,920 days of her spirit breaking over and over, trying to find that little bit of strength in her to fight back.

2,920 days if not being able to see the sun or feel the cool gentle

breeze on her skin.

2,920 days of loneliness, crying, and punishment when she doesn't follow orders. Whether that means being put in a self-deprivation tank or being thrown into a dark room for days on end without any food or water, or light.

El knows it's been not days or weeks that they've had her but years.

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Sometimes she can't remember their names all too well but she remembers their faces, their actions, the way they *all* made her feel: Protected. Like Brenner, or the bad men couldn't get to her when they were around. They were family.

Brenner keeps her locked up, only able to use her abilities when it conveniences him. So she's been unable to search for them in the void.

But at night? Eleven has been trying to get in contact with Will. She meshed their dreamspace together to find him, to tell him she's still alive, the gate is still open, and they pretended she died to just take her way again. They did something to Hopper, to put him to sleep, so he wouldn't see. She wants to ask him if everyone's alright. She wants to tell him so, so much but can't.

No matter how much she screams and cries for him, it never works. She's been unsuccessful for 2,920 days. Until one night, she finds herself someplace new, someplace she hasn't been before, an exact replica of her confinement space in the lab, an inch of water underfoot. It takes all her strength, a *reach into the void* , to erase her surroundings and clear her thoughts. She walks forward into the darkness but is blocked by some invisible wall. She pounds on it until she crumbles onto the wet floor, defeated. But her ears perk up at the sound of someone calling out: "Hello? (What is this place?) Is anyone here?"

She's not alone. *She's not alone!*

"Will?" El calls back, voice shot. Eleven scrambles onto her feet, banging on the wall between them. "Will! Will! Help! Will, help!"

She's not sure if it's even him, but hopes. He sounds different. Not like a little kid anymore.

Eleven's forgot most of the words Hopper and Mike taught her by now, from being in constant isolation, except for the basic ones. She wants to tell him everything, but cannot due to not being able to find the words, so she keeps yelling his name, mentally blocked.

Will responds back with much urgency, "Where are you? *Where are you?* " He cries, yet he cannot find her. He bangs on the wall, identical to where she is.

It's been 2,920 days and El is beginning to give up hope.

3. Mike

Summary for the Chapter:

But it's times like these that he really values and appreciates Max, even if they sometimes butt heads and get into arguments about basically nothing. Sharing a dorm room is hard on occasions. They both would hate to admit it but they're best of friends that would, probably, do anything for each other.

Max isn't coming back to Hawkins to see her mother and step-dad, hell no. She came along to support him.

December 20th, 1992

Mike looks out the car window, *break my body* by the *pixies* playing lowly in the background. He takes in Hawkins in winter, still the same desolate, menacing, sad place it's always been. The trees are bare, and the roads icy.

He's breaking out into a cold sweat, trying his hardest to stop fidgeting, his knee jumping up and down like a windup toy.

Despite coming back every year for the holidays, it never gets old, that feeling he gets when crossing the state line, the drop in his stomach as if he's on a roller-coaster ride. He feels like that scared little kid again, trembling and frozen, and not the fully grown adult he is.

Zippering past the Hawkins Sign that has bright red spray paint on it spelling out: "WELCOME TO HELL."

Pretty good overall assessment.

As the car passes into the main part of town he starts to get nostalgic and has a feeling of dread deep in the pit of his stomach. Just driving through Hawkins, ignites something in him - fear. Why is he even coming home again? He could have just waited longer. *Maybe forever.*

Mike flinches when a hand shoves his shoulder, breaking through the parasitic thoughts infecting his mind. "Asshole, I asked you if you're alright." Max says, focusing her eyes back on the road.

Mike blows a cold breath out, shaking his hands and putting them together to gain what little warmth he can. "I'm fine. Just thinking."

Max replies without glancing back at him. "Thinking about what? You must have been thinking pretty hard if you couldn't hear me."

"Nothing," Mike shrugs. Liar.

"Are you scared?" Max starts, "You know you don't have to be. I'm here for," A pause. "Emotional support. I know your parents can be a little.." She trails off, unsure how to finish her sentence.

Oh, he knows.

But it's times like these that he really values and appreciates Max, even if they sometimes butt heads and get into arguments about basically nothing. Sharing a dorm room is hard on occasions. They both would hate to admit it but they're best of friends that would, probably, do anything for each other.

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"Annoying?" He groans, "They get on my damn nerves sometimes. *When are you gonna get a girlfriend? Are you bringing her home? When are you gonna start dating again?*" He imitates, "Like sorry, take the hint, it's never gonna happen."

Max hums in response but then tilts her head slightly, lifting a shoulder up, "At least Nancy's gonna be here too this time. She'll back you up."

Mike lets out a little sigh. "I haven't talked to my sister in a year, I don't know what's going on with her anymore and I.. I think she wants it that way."

"Don't be ridiculous, she's probably busy. It's just sibling, life stuff."

"I know, it's just - we've never gone so long without talking."

They let silence overcome them. The song on the radio fizzling out as Max pulls into the cul de sac.

Mike feels trepidation, and uneasiness wash over him, his heart rate

racing and the blood pulsing behind his ears. He's starting to wonder why he ever thought coming back was a good idea.

4. Will

Summary for the Chapter:

Once he sets down his luggage in his old room and takes a look around to see everything exactly the same, in the same places, he decides that coming back home was a really bad decision. The silence is so relieving that his chest barely tightens when he sees his familiar walls, papered in band posters and his old artwork his mother has always cherished from little. Still, too many memories.

Notes for the Chapter:

Two chapters in a row? Yup, I was inspired.

December 20th, 1992

The Byers' home hasn't changed much in the four years Will has been away. The gravel path leading up to the house is overgrown with weeds and the porch still sags in the middle. Mounds of snow on the roof and ground from the recent snow dusting yesterday night.

Will knocks on the front door of his old house. His childhood home. The house he grew up in, the walls that he's known his entire life.

The house that he hadn't returned to in over four years. Not to say he hasn't seen his family in four years. He did. They always came to him in California. It's been a long year, one without any visits and triple the phone calls from his concerned and well meaning mother, and the occasional pass of the phone to Hopper, his stepfather.

Returning home meant a lot of memories resurfacing. The ones he isn't particularly fond of, as-well as the ones he tried to run away from. Although he's certain, being here, in Hawkins, right before Christmas, the past is going to catch up with him. *That's something he isn't looking forward to.*

He stands at the door, shifting his weight onto both feet as he shivers. Will pushes the bit of snow off of the front door mat with his boot. The words reading, "*Welcome Home!*"

He hears footsteps, and someone shouting "Coming!"

The door is pulled open, revealing Jonathan, his mass of chestnut hair and swoopy bangs, and his grin when he looks at his younger brother.

"Thank god. Mom and Hop were getting worried."

Will can't stop the grin that splits his features as he wraps his arms tightly around Jonathan.

He squeezes back, almost bruisingly hard. "I missed you little brother." Jonathan says over his shoulder.

Now looking into the house Will can see the brightly colored christmas lights all hung around, cheerfully decorating the interior.

The whole house smells of cinnamon and clover, and everything *christmas*, the whole shebang, it momentarily makes him scrunch up his nose at the scent.

“Missed you too.”

“Jon!” Will’s mother’s voice comes from inside, sounding frazzled, like usual. “Is that Will?”

“Yup!” Jonathan pops the p.

When they pull apart Jonathan walks right back into the house, leaving the door hanging open for Will to enter. The warmth inside is stifling the frigid air and Will immediately finds himself peeling off his coat, and hanging it up on the hooks near the door, placing his luggage down.

“Oh my God, Will.” His mother’s screech proceeded with her arms twining themselves around him. Before he can even hug back, she pulls herself away, holding him at arm’s length to scrutinize him with wide eyes. “Look at you! Look how tall you are! You’re so thin! Jonathan, doesn’t he look thin? You’re not eating enough in California-”

The feelings of familiarity and nostalgia are so overwhelming that Will feels momentarily dizzy.

He feels like she’s asking him a million questions at the same time and he tries his best to keep up. *How was the flight? Did you have trouble driving here from the airport? How's college? Are you hungry?* And blah, blah, blah.

“Where’s dad?” Will says to Jonathan, looking around the kitchen, peering as much as he can into the living room and down the hallway.

Joyce has her back faced to the wall, checking on dinner. An oven mitt on her hand as she pulls the rack out the oven to only find whatever it is she’s making is not done. (*“Not even close.” She mutters to herself.*)

“He’s in the back. Chopping wood.”

“Why?”

Jonathan raises his eyebrows and shrugs, “Dunno.”

Joyce adds, turning around and with a smile, “You know how he is. He always wants to be doing something.”

Once he sets down his luggage in his old room and takes a look around to see everything exactly the same, in the same places, he decides that coming back home was a *really* bad decision. The silence is so relieving that his chest barely tightens when he sees his familiar walls, papered in band posters and his old artwork his mother has always cherished from little. *Still, too many memories.*

There are times where his brain fries up. It's no excuse he knows, it's

his own behaviour. He tries to stay calm, and then a trigger is flicked. His emotions turn cold, fearful, anxious... he backs away, flees or hurts someone who loves him. It's hurting that someone that he can't deal with. Instead of being an adult, he sometimes shows the frightened child within, damaged and afraid, the one still hiding in the dark in Castle Byers, being hunted by the demogorgon. He only hopes that one day he can get past it, until his body stops living in a state of flight or fight, until he finds a way back to being calm and steady. He learned how to hide the pain, how to look normal. How to control his powers, *mostly*, and avoid any weird disturbances people who are looking for that sort can see. Will understands what it's like to have numbness over feeling, kind of like mental amnesia.

He knows what it's like to find experiences that are normal, weird. Like the taste of cake, or the smell of fresh linen, there are times where it can just all be too much. Will's over sensitive about certain things, irritated by the sound of a tap dripping, or a shirt that's too tight, or flinching when someone touches his arm. The experience of sensory overload is too much in itself, the things around him are too great for his nervous system - and he's not able to process or make meaning of it. A trigger can be loud noises or bright light, the feeling of dread, the pitch of a particular song, or the smell of coconut shampoo and citrus soap. It's hard to concentrate or sit still at points, everything is coming at him all at once, every sound is like someone is in his ear with a megaphone and he can't focus on anything. It becomes a blur, like bees are buzzing around his head.

It makes his muscles tense up. There's an invisible wall between his brain and the rest of his body. It cuts in and sometimes he has a full blown panic attack, or very vivid episodes of his time spent in the upside down. The flashbacks make him relive it all, whether this means seeing, hearing, or feeling it take place, having vivid nightmares, or being simply terrified without understanding why. It feels a bit like having one foot in the present and one in the past. He's overly alert, irritable, and wound up, finding it hard to concentrate or sleep, being startled or constantly on the alert for danger. Avoiding any reminder of the past - including his hometown, and old friends. Sometimes he feels detached from the world, like it's

a disconnection of his memories, feelings, and sense of self. It's automatic and completely out of Will's control.

If he could fix things, he would.